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Luciana Ranelli '13 and Ashleigh Thompson '13 honored with 2011 University of Minnesota Scholarly Excellence in Equity and Diversity Awards

Summary: The award recognizes students doing outstanding equity, social justice, and diversity work through academics and/or community service.

(November 30, 2011)-University of Minnesota, Morris students Luciana Ranelli and Ashleigh Thompson were honored with 2011 University of Minnesota Scholarly Excellence in Equity and Diversity (SEED) Awards. The award, sponsored by the Office for Equity and Diversity (OED), recognizes University undergraduate, graduate, and professional students who are doing outstanding equity, social justice, and diversity work through academics and/or service to the community. Thirteen students demonstrating outstanding achievement and leadership in the areas of academic performance and/or community outreach/activism received the 2011 award, including Ranelli and Thompson from the Morris campus.

SEED awardee Luciana Ranelli '13, Duluth, biology, secondary education

"It is a real honor to be recognized for the valuable pairing of a strong academic drive with vision and action for a more inclusive campus, community, and society," says Ranelli, "and it's great that Morris was so represented. It's encouragement to keep working, empowering others, and recognizing all the great work that happens by others as well."

Ranelli states that her work at Morris has been "basically about fostering voice." One of her current projects is planning the Equity, Diversity, and Intercultural Connections Retreat that will be held in January 2012. She says, "We're looking at discovering and developing personal stories, how they all fit together, and how to effectively challenge hurtful, assuming statements and communicate possible solutions. My philosophy with equity and diversity work aligns with how I relate to peers and teach kids. It's about planting a seed of an idea and letting the individual make it his/her own. The way I build connections, as well as the way I teach kids, reflects the importance of diversity and equity—the goals rely heavily on community, sharing, and personal development."

In addition to the retreat, Ranelli is active in Symphonic Winds, playing clarinet and serving as section leader and on the council, the Nordic Ski Club, serving as co-chair, Queer Issues Committee, Equity and Diversity Program Planning Committee, and she has completed a Morris Academic Partnership with Margaret Kuchenreuther, professor of biology. This spring she will serve on the Scholastic Committee, and her past campus leadership activities include the Morris Campus Student Association and the General Education Review Committee.

SEED awardee Ashleigh Thompson '13, Salt Lake City, Utah, anthropology, American Indian Studies

Thompson began her academic career at Morris as an environmental science major. She was accepted as a Science, Technology, and Engineering Program for Native Americans participant at Morris and continued her research through the Multi-Ethnic Mentorship Program paired with Chris Cole, professor of biology. She completed an Undergraduate Research Access for Minorities Program at the University of Utah.

Thompson served as of Morris chapter co-chair of the American Indian Science and Engineering Society and as a

community adviser for the Morris Wind, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Talent Expansion Program (WindSTEP).

“Serving as an adviser to the Native high school students who participated in WindSTEP was important,” reflects Thompson. “Not only did I help them in the educational part of the program, I served as a role model. It was important for them to see a Native person in a college student role. I was happy to help and be a mentor to show them that they could attend college and do well here. One of the students in the program is now a freshman at UMM, which I’m glad to see.”

Now an anthropology and American Indian Studies major, Thompson says, “I still have a great interest in learning about earth sciences, as well as protecting the Earth. The environment is connected to everything we do. In anthropology, the study of humans, the environment plays a significant role. The environment has a deep impact on humans, often responsible for the changes we see in society. In turn, humans have significant power when it comes to changing the environment. I’m interested in archaeology. Because humans leave behind material remains and impacts to their environment that are preserved in the archaeological record, archaeologists are able to study the human past. The environment is a fundamental tool in preserving history.”

Serving as chair of the Circle of Nations Indigenous Association 2011 Powwow was also a rewarding experience for Thompson. “Hosting the powwow on campus is fun, as well as a way for me, an Ojibwe student, to participate in cultural events at school. It is also important to educate the public and show that Native people are a thriving people with a rich culture.”

The OED, which sponsors the SEED awards, works to infuse the core values of equity and diversity into all aspects of teaching, learning, research, service, and outreach throughout the University of Minnesota system. The OED believes that the University community flourishes when all its students, staff, faculty, and external supporters have a place to grow and thrive.

Photo: Luciana Ranelli '13 (left) and Ashleigh Thompson '13

Photo credit: Paul Ranelli

Through personal and academic discovery, the University of Minnesota, Morris provides opportunities for students to grow intellectually, engage in community, experience environmental stewardship and celebrate diversity. A renewable and sustainable educational experience, Morris prepares graduates for careers, for advanced degrees, for lifelong learning, for work world flexibility in the future, and for global citizenship. Learn more about Morris at morris.umn.edu or call 888-866-3382.